

The Wedding

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Summary: Noble Team attends a wedding. Pairing: Kat/Carter

1. Chapter 1

Part I:

"You're not even trying, are you, Kat?" said Carter.

He had one hand at her waist and the other was gripping her limp one. They were shifting awkwardly around the studio, mostly trying to avoid the other dancers.

"Are you ordering me to, Commander?" Kat replied.

The song stopped and a new one started, with the dance instructor clapping and calling out the steps in his too-cheerful voice. Kat trudged on, reluctantly. Her functional shoes clunked against the wood floors. Despite her coiled Spartan grace, she felt large and ungainly in this roomful of young women with their butterfly skirts and light, skittering heels.

"I don't see why you have to make this so hard," said Carter. He grunted as he tried to maneuver her into a box-step. She refused to move her feet in anything remotely resembling a box-step.

"_I _don't see why we have to do this at all," Kat shot back.

Carter released a long-suffering sigh. "We're doing this because Jorge wants dancing at the wedding."

"I highly doubt that."

"Alright, so the bride wants dancing at the wedding. And what she wants, he wants. And what he wants, we provide." He said it in his

authoritative commando voice, the let's-get-it-done-and-get-home-safe-Noble-Team voice that she used to hear over the radio right before a mission. Apparently, making their teammate's special day as perfect as possible was a mission he took as seriously as neutralizing a Covenant threat.

"Besides," said Carter, "Jun looks like he's having fun."

He turned her around so she could look over his shoulder.

"He's grimacing, not smiling," said Kat. "And Emile looks like he's about to murder somebody."

The instructor had sidled up to Emile and was vigorously massaging the Spartan's broad shoulders. "C'mon!" he chirped. "Loosen up, big boy! Let the music flow through you!"

"_Something's_ going to flow," Kat muttered. "His blood, specifically, if he keeps that up. Come on, Commander, can we at least skip the etiquette lesson?"

Carter raised an eyebrow and gave her a stony stare. She sighed, relenting, and decided that it wasn't wholly unpleasant to have the Commander's hand against the small of her back, and to rest her chin on his shoulder from time to time. It was almost _nice_.

They almost never touched like this, gentle and unhurried and without the threat of danger or discovery. She wasn't unused to touching him, of course, but _this_ was different, very different from being slung across his back while fleeing an explosion, or being pulled bodily into a Warthog at 130 kilometers per hour.

It was different than even when they touched inâ€¦| _other _capacities that weren't strictly professional. But she pushed _that _to the back of her mind.

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"If I see another bowl of soup, I'll puke," Jun grouched from behind her, as the group stepped out into the afternoon sun.

"Puke all you want _after_ the wedding, rifleman," said Carter, even though Jun hadn't fired a rifle in combat since the war ended.

Kat walked ahead of them, stretching out her neck, glad to be free from the confines of the mirrored dance studio, and the pastel-colored dining parlor that smelled perpetually of soup and cheap champagne.

The air was cool and the sun was pale yellow on the pathway that led away from the building. They were on the cusp of one of planet Reaping's mild winters and warm springs, before the days would grow hotter and hotter, with the sun blazing gold over the wheat fields waiting for AI-controlled machinery to rumble through the summer harvest.

Kat adjusted her muffler against the wind, and was distracted by the smell of roses. There was still a sheen of frost over the grass and it crunched under Kat's feet like sugar as she wandered away from the others.

"â€¦ if he poked me one more time with that _posture-correcting _stick, I was going to shove a 7.62Ã—51mm cartridge sideways up hisâ€¦"

"Be nice to the civilians, Jun," Carter said mildly.

"Don't see why Jorge has to be so fussy about this anyway."

"He just wants his special day. And after all he's been through, I'd say he's earned it."

Jun huffed. "Right. I hear he's retiring so he can play civilian. Really, a melon farm? A Spartan can't want that for the rest of his life."

"Maybe, but do you really want to tell the big man what he can or can't want?"

"â€¦ Good point, sir."

Their voices faded as Kat roamed to the left of the path. She found a rosebush with dark green leaves, silver-tipped with frost, and flowers growing in fat clusters, red as blood. She touched one of the curly petals with her good hand and rubbed it between her fingers like she was testing good velvet.

The perfume stirred a memory in the back of her cool, analytic mind, one so distant that it was a blur of sounds and colors. But the scent of roses was very sharp in her memory. It surrounded her, like it did now. Her eyes fluttered and she inhaled deeply.

She remembered a bowl of them, fat, nodding roses that drooped low to the table. She remembered her child's hand, dimpled and pink, reaching for one of the blooms while standing tip-toe on a chair. She remembered pursing her mouth with longing to taste the roses, wondering if they'd be very sweet, if they'd melt in her mouth like ripe strawberries. Behind her in the kitchen was a woman crooning a folksong while grease popped in pan.

Kat pursed her mouth in the imitation of her childhood self. Impetuously, she reached behind a rose and plucked at it from the sepals.

"Vandalism, Kat?" said Emile. He came up behind her, startling her but not enough to make her jump. "Didn't know you liked pretty flowers."

"I don't," she said defensively, pulling her hand back in a clearly guilty manner.

He looked pointedly at the rosebush and then back at her.

"It's just thatâ€¦" She gave an awkward shrug. "It's roses. The smell. It reminds me ofâ€¦ you know. Things. From before."

Emile didn't reply, and he turned away unsmiling.

Most Spartans had a "trigger," a sight, smell, color, or taste that sent them back to a childhood memory, a memory that was as vague as

cloudy soup, but sweeter than sugar and sharper than a wound. It was something secret and deeply emotional, something that went beyond the pain and the fire and the regimental training. Something buried, like a single sweet cherry that had sunk to the bottom of a glass. _Something _that proved they had a life before the war, that they had a home other than camp Currahee, that they had family other than Lieutenant Ambrose, Chief Mendez, and the other Spartans.

It might have been the smell of good coffee, or the sting of a bee, or the crunch of bicycle wheels on gravel. For her, it was the heady perfume of roses.

She looked at Emile's retreating back, military-straight, as he rejoined the others. She sighed, almost apologetically. He was the only one she knew that couldn't remember anything at all.

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Notes: So, this takes place after the war. Jorge, being older, has retired from active duty. Hope you liked the first chapter! Thanks very much for reading and please review!

2. Chapter 2

Part II:

Jorge had generously put them up in a hotel for the duration of the wedding. It was a place that tried its best to be modern yet homey, a solid, rectangular building atop a green hill, miraculously unscathed from the war.

Jun and Emile were roomed downstairs, with windows that faced the sunrise. Carter was down the corridor from Kat, on the top floor.

Kat's room was uncomfortably comfortable. The bedding was pale rose and the wallpaper was cream. There was a television screen that disappeared discreetly behind a wood panel when unneeded, a holo-fireplace that crackled lightly in the centrally heated air, and real printed books on the shelves. A digital touchscreen near the bed controlled the door lock, the temperature, the television, and the tint on the windows.

It was too cozy. It was too _nice_. And she couldn't sleep.

She sat up in her comfortable bed and reached for the data pad on the nightstand, figuring she might as well work if she couldn't sleep. She thumbed through various files, searching to see if the lab reports from her research center at HQ had come in yet.

Memories distracted her from work, just as they had distracted her from sleep. She wasn't unused to that. It wasn't unusual for her to close her eyes and see plasma flashes, to hear Carter's voice rapping out orders over the screams of the battlefieldâ€| and to think about Thom. (_Oh, Thom.)_

But it wasn't any of those things that kept her up tonight. Instead, she thought about Jorge and the easy way he smiled since the war ended. She thought about the wedding invitation in its thick cream

envelope. She thought about the strange, outlandish concept of marriage, more alien to her than the Covenant. It wasn't war that kept her up. It was peace.

And she thought about _him _and whether he was sitting up awake in his bed down the hall, thinking of marriage.

The room was stuffy. She threw aside the soft pink covers and went to the window. It had a safety feature that would only open it halfway, so she retrieved her data pad and hacked into the computer system, overriding the safety feature from her room.

She threw the window wide open and welcomed the cold air on her skin. It smelled green and damp and carried the cool, hopeful scent of spring.

Kat crossed her arms over her chest and sighed. She wasn't used to sleeping in a comfortable bed with rose covers and frilly pillowcases. She wasn't used to staring out a window and not flicking her eyes over each landmark for enemies and sightlines. She wasn't used to breathing the night air and not scenting it for danger, like an alert bloodhound. She wasn't used to peace.

There was a noise. No, not really a noise, more a _feeling, _a _presence. _She turned around abruptly and stared at the door.

She knew it was Carter. There was no shadow over the line of light under the door, but she knew it was him. He didn't knock or call out to her, but she could almost feel the imprint of his hand on the smooth wood, the brush of his fingers over the gold letters of her room number.

She wondered what he was doing there. They had agreed beforehand that they wouldn't see each other at night during Jorge's wedding. Civilians tended to gossip. Spartans too.

The silence lingered. She listened carefully and didn't hear him leave.

She sauntered over to the touchscreen and thumbed the door controls. "It's unlocked," she called out recklessly into the dark.

She waited a heartbeat. Slowly, the handle turned and the door opened to reveal the Commander. He stepped in, checked outside to see no one was watching, and closed the door behind him. There was a moment's silence between them.

"Did I wake you?" he said awkwardly.

She bit her lip and shook her head. They were never awkward with each other, but Jorge's wedding had thrown them both out of their element.

"No," she replied. She shifted over on the bed in a silent welcome. He took it and crossed the room to sit next to her.

"Am I interrupting anything?" he said, gesturing to the glowing data pad.

"Not really. Carterâ€¦ I thought we agreed we weren't going

toâ€| "

"Do you want me to go?" he said quickly.

"No," she said, also quickly. "Stay."

She touched the back of his neck with her fingers in that soft massaging motion she knew he liked. The stubble at the nape of his neck tickled her skin. She heard him sigh, felt his head droop.

"Is something the matter?" she asked.

"Couldn't sleep," he said. "Too many thoughts rolling around in my head. All this wedding businessâ€| Kept thinking about Jorge, wondering if he's going to be happy."

Kat shrugged. "He always was the most human of us. Figures he'd be the one to get married, to a civilian no less."

"Yeah," Carter chuckled. "Married." He said the word slowly, thoughtfully, letting it roll off his tongue. The word hung in the air between them, between their bodies, warm and full of unspoken meaning. Neither of them said anything for a few long minutes.

"We should get some rest," Kat suggested gently.

"Big day tomorrow," Carter agreed.

They lay down, side by side in the wide, comfortable bed. They pulled the cream and rose comforter over their bodies and rested their heads on the frilly pillows. Neither of them said a word. They lay as still as a pair of dolls in a crib, staring at the ceiling.

Kat wondered if this was how Jorge would lie down with his wife tomorrow, and then night after night after night. Would he rest his head into the soft pillows and think nothing but peaceful, happy thoughts? Would he dream peaceful dreams?

Carter shifted next to her. He turned over on his side and very slowly, very gingerly, put his arm around her. She felt his breath on her neck, and his heartbeat. She closed her eyes.

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Notes: So there's part 2! Next up should be the ceremony itself. Also, does anyone know if Kat's arm is a permanent prosthetic? Or is it some sort of armor attachment that she takes off after missions?

Thanks so much for reading and please take the time to review!
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End
file.